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**Book review - Allison Levy, Widowhood and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe**

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images. If those who are most intimately familiar with them do not consider that the illustrations are important, how then are art historians supposed to know that they even exist. At the same time, Knapp's focus on English texts means that he downplays the international nature of print media, the book trade in general, and the printed image in particular. But it is not surprising that art historians, whose interests often do not correlate to those of literary scholars, might be more interested in the wider market of print culture than the specificities of the English book.

Another quibble is that, although Knapp criticises earlier scholars for not paying enough attention to the book page or the particular image or the relation of image to text, he himself does not deal with these matters in any depth. For example, when he discusses the different usages of typefaces and number of columns on the page to designate English and foreign language sources in John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* he neither includes reproductions of any examples nor discussing the impact of this. Nor does he compare this manipulation of the page to similar design solutions in manuscripts. I also found it frustrating that he did not analyse more fully the different sizes and placement of imagery within these books nor how they compared to other contemporary books both within England and abroad.

While for an art historian Knapp leaves many questions hanging, I found this book extremely compelling and it is one that I will return to again and again when doing my own research. It is certainly a significant contribution to any discussion of book culture.

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**Levy, Allison, ed.,** *Widowhood and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Women and Gender in the Early Modern World), Aldershot, Ashgate, 2003; hardback; pp. 266; 101 b/w plates; RRP US\$79.95; ISBN 0754607313.

The past decade has witnessed the appearance of a number of excellent edited essay collections dealing with widowhood in the European past, including Louise Mirrer's *Upon My Husband's Death: Widows in the Literature and Histories of Medieval Europe* (1992), Cindy L. Carlson and Angela Jane Weisl's *Constructions of Widowhood and Virginity in the Middle Ages* (1999), and Sandra Cavallo and Lyndan Warner's *Widowhood in Medieval and Early*

*Modern Europe* (1999). The essays assembled by Allison Levy in *Widowhood and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe* offer a distinctive contribution to the existing scholarship, shifting the focus away from social, legal, and discursive constructions of widowhood to explore instead the 'understudied correlation' between widowhood and such visual media as painting, architecture, sculpture, mourning ritual, and so on. The volume's 15 essays together make a compelling case for widows' active involvement in the production and perpetuation of visual culture (particularly in their capacity as patrons), and offer a thorough portrayal of widows' centrality in the memorial practices of their day.

The strength of the volume is twofold. First, it fuses social history with close interpretations of images, artefacts, and architectural spaces, an approach that emphasises the dynamic interaction between legal, social, creative, and individual interpretations of widowhood. This approach is particularly assured in the hands of Michael E. Yonan, Marina Arnold, Sara French, and Christelle L. Baskins, all of whom offer carefully contextualised and astute analyses of their materials. Secondly, the geographical and historical breadth of this volume effectively highlights the volatility of widowhood not only as a socio-historical phenomenon but, crucially, as a lived state that was endured (or embraced) by individual women in a vast range of circumstances.

To this end, Levy has made sound editorial decisions in assembling this volume, selecting essays that range from the *trecento* to the eighteenth century. And while there is a concentration of discussion on Italian widows, analysis also extends to England, France, Spain, Germany, and Austria. The division of the volume into four thematic sections works as a sound organising principle, allowing complementary essays to offer suggestive commentary on one another. For instance, the essays on Caterina Sforza, Marie de Médici, and Empress Maria Theresia, which together form Part II of the volume, offer accounts that echo and build on one another, despite their historical and geographical disparity. Levy also includes a useful number of images to illustrate the essays' arguments, although at times reading the volume would have been less cumbersome if the images had been included in the separate essays themselves, rather than gathered together in a section at the centre of the book.

The volume's wide-ranging temporal and geographic reach is, however, vitiated somewhat by a similarity of argument across a number of essays. *Widowhood and Visual Culture* is marked by a celebratory emphasis that returns arguably too persistently to cases of powerful widows who managed their own fortunes, self-representations, and their custodianship of communal and familial memory. It is not

difficult to find passing references throughout the volume to the many unfortunate Early Modern women whose widowhood brought them into poverty and obscurity, and attracted the intense surveillance reserved for unattached women. Such women, however, seem not to have attracted sustained interest from the volume's editor or contributors, who seem more drawn to the cases of those influential and privileged women, such as Dogaressas, princesses, and empresses, who had the means to circumvent patriarchal control and determine their own fates. These privileged examples are undoubtedly serviceable to the volume's feminist reclamation of early modern widows as subversive agents rather than victims or objects of patriarchal control. Nevertheless, I was left feeling that this was not the whole story of how Early Modern widows interacted with the visual culture of their day. Perhaps a follow-up volume could be considered, in order to give equal attention to the participation of less privileged women in Early Modern visual culture.

The essays are all careful to distinguish the different ways in which widowhood was articulated in specific early modern contexts. However, as a reader with an interest in late medieval widowhood, I would have liked some more analysis of how Early Modern widowhood developed out of earlier models and experiences. A few exceptions notwithstanding, the volume's unacknowledged acceptance of the medieval/Early Modern divide gave the impression that the practices and representations of Early Modern widowhood were *sui generis*, untethered from the medieval past.

While a number of pages contain more footnote than text, for the most part the essays combine sound scholarship with an accessibility of style and clarity of argument that fit them for an upper-level undergraduate audience as well as an academic readership. The only exception to this accessibility is Levy's own prose style which, in both her introduction and contributing chapter, is occasionally opaque and marked by overlong sentences and the use of quasi-deconstructive phraseology and redundant punctuation. The repetition of phrases such as 'always already unstable' strike the reader as stylistic and rhetorical rather than explicatory. There is also a tendency toward redundant wordplay (such as the introduction's title, 'Widow's Peek') which functions to suggest, but not fully develop, lines of enquiry. These occasional infelicities are not, however, reflective of the volume as a whole, and they ultimately do not detract significantly from the admirable project on which she and her contributors have embarked.

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